



## *Darjeeling Children's Trust*

### *Newsletter, Summer 2018*

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Welcome to the summer 2018 edition of the Darjeeling Children's Trust newsletter. In this edition we continue to follow the lives of some of the children and young people who are being supported through the Trust and who are funded through your generous donations. Some of those young people, who were very small when we first met them as long as ten years ago, are now making their own way in the world supporting their families and developing their own careers. It is an amazing journey to watch them flourish.

I hope that you will enjoy reading about some of their stories.

Thank you for your continued support.

Marilyn Adams, Chairperson

#### **Studying gets easier with support from DCT**

Improvements funded by DCT at Mahatma Gandhi School have included new security and safety fences around the playground, new whiteboards, glass to windows and new gates but perhaps the improvements with the most impact have been the new roof, ceiling and floorboards to the school hall. The hall is used for lessons throughout the year as well as for pre-exam revision, and as a venue for the exams themselves. Although the students are like many others worldwide and dislike exams, they clearly benefit from having a dry, well maintained environment in which to study without having to dodge the rain drops coming through the ceiling during the monsoon.

The school continues to benefit with others from supplies of stationery including pencils, rulers and exercise books. The students at the schools DCT supports in this way are from families who struggle to find enough money to feed themselves and for whom buying pencils is often low priority. Some may be day labourers whose income depends on being employed as porters or as labourers on building sites, or who have come to the town for a short time to fill a labour shortage. Many students are the children of migrant tea workers or have parents who travel every year from the plains to find work in Darjeeling.



*The hall after improvement*



## Delight in books and stories

This March our travelling library took on a new cross curriculum approach. Whilst our librarian/storyteller Tschering had already been using craft activities to engage some of the children, after a discussion with volunteer and qualified teacher Grant, she is now enthusiastically using this approach with all the classes she is teaching. Even the most disaffected child – young and old – seems to love colouring and making things and Tschering is using this to develop the children's interest in books and learning.



Music too continues to go from strength to strength and Rajib is preparing the children for a concert during the autumn when they will show off their prowess. The concert will take place in the newly improved hall at Mahatma Gandhi School



## Flourishing with your help – developing skills and gaining confidence

Self-confidence is a huge gift and some of our sponsored children are showing they have it in spades. Rehaan recently took part in a school inter class hand writing competition and won the Gold Medal which made him, his parents and us very proud.



Other young people have become prefects in their final year before they pass on to their last two years at school. They will take responsibility for helping staff and their fellow pupils and will develop a keen sense of social responsibility.



Many of the children take part in poetry reading competitions or performances of song and dance which as the photos here show, looks like lots of fun. Some sponsored children are active in sports, especially Tai Kwando, and compete at state level, and many of the girls are being trained in self-defence. Congratulations to all of them for their achievements.

## One boy's story



Left to right: Pasang when we first met him in 2009; a year later and then in his mid-teens.. Finally in his uniform at the FCI doing his hotel management training.

We first met Pasang in 2009 when he was sponsored through DCT into a better school. In the nine years since then his life has undergone many changes, it is a long time in the life of a small boy growing up. In his mid-teens his parents' marriage unfortunately broke down and at a young age he became the man of the family trying to earn some extra money to help support his mother and his younger brother for whom he has always felt a great sense of responsibility. For a while, in addition to going to school, he sought work as a porter carrying enormous loads up and down the steep hills of Darjeeling, contributing much needed cash to the family budget until his mother got back on her feet. Luckily DCT trustees were able to help until the family sorted itself out and Pasang was commissioned to write a series of short articles about his life in Darjeeling enabling him to give up his porter's work. He is an articulate young man and a talented artist and some of his stories found their way in to an earlier newsletter. Here is part of what he wrote about the monsoon -

*"Of all the seasons in Darjeeling Hills, the rainy season is the most beautiful and beloved one.... In the summer season the earth gets hot, the pond, lake and stream become dry. There is scarcity of water in everywhere. The wind and dirt storm make life miserable. ..Then the rain begins. The dark and rolling clouds cover the whole Darjeeling Hills. A sense of pleasure fills the atmosphere. The children bathe in the shower of rain... the small children float paper boats in the drains or in the stream. They shout when their boat sinks or is carried away by the current of water.... Everything in nature after the rain bears a fresh look....House and street which are covered in dirt is washed out by the rain. Frog also begins to croak ..."*

Needless to say, all the upset meant his school work suffered and he failed to get high enough marks to stay on at his school and had to move to a government school. To his great credit he worked hard and passed all his Class 12 exams at the end of his school career and with encouragement from DCT trustees he successfully completed his training in hotel management.

During a visit to Darjeeling in March this year it was possible to meet up once more with Pasang and hear about his practical 6-month placement at the end of his college-based training. He told us that he had travelled to Bangalore where he had worked in a five-star hotel on the front desk. He described how hard it was, how his first lodgings had had bed bugs and how it had been a long way from the hotel so with the travelling the days were even longer after his shift finished. He described how strict the hotel management was and how at times he felt *"like a soldier in the front line without a gun!"* At one point he felt like giving up but when he thought about the support he had had from DCT to get to that point he simply didn't want to let anyone down and he didn't want to let himself down, so he stayed. He described how proud he was when after three months he was put in charge of the hotel front desk overnight, it was a pivotal moment.



The hotel offered Pasang a job on a good starting salary but in the end, he decided to turn it down and return to Darjeeling where, although earning less money, he can continue to help his mother and especially his brother. He is now employed at one of the top heritage hotels in Darjeeling, enjoying life and his hobbies of art and photography. We all wish him the very best for his future, wherever it may take him.

## The FCI story continues!

The five young women and one young man who began their course in late 2017 have now travelled hundreds of miles away from Darjeeling to complete their practical training. In the light of Pasang's experience they are likely to find life tough for the next 6 months but completing the course means that their skills will be in demand in hotels all over India and abroad.

Meanwhile the next cohort of six young people have been accepted and are being measured up for new uniforms and are acquiring the books and equipment they will need over the next year. One of the new students is shown here with his mother. This will bring the number of young people who have benefited from DCT support to undertake this course to 48 – lives which are being changed for the better with your support.

## News of old students

Former FCI students often pop in to see Major Wangdi when they are back in Darjeeling and in March it was Palden's turn (*shown right in 2012 and 2019 far right*). Starting in 2012, he was one of the first students DCT supported to complete the hotel management course and in March this year he was home on holiday after completing a 2-year contract in Dubai. He described how when he was first there he felt really homesick, so much so that he paid for his own fare home for a holiday after his first year away. In the end he decided to go back and complete his contract and worked as a barista in charge of coffee production in charge of his own café.

He has now returned to Dubai on a new contract for a different employer – he told us it is ok to change jobs if you have worked there a minimum of 6 months. He described how it is hard work, often with 10 hour shifts, and he must share a room, bathroom and cooking facilities with four others, but he sees it as a means to a better life. He gets a good salary, which he is saving, and after working in Dubai for possibly 4-5 more years he plans to return home and start his own business.

Palden agreed to go and talk to the orphanage boys about FCI and gave an enthusiastic and confident talk about what is involved in the training and job.

## Congratulations to young people who passed their exams

As students get older there are important exams at the end of Classes 10 and 12 and it is necessary to pass the first ones to progress on to study for the second, Successful completion at Class 12 level then gives access to undergraduate and other courses.

Congratulations to Binay and Doma for passing their Class 10 exams, they have now moved on to new schools where they are both doing well. Well done also to Anup who passed his Class 12 exams and who is now at college studying for a Bachelor of Business Administration.



## News from the orphanages

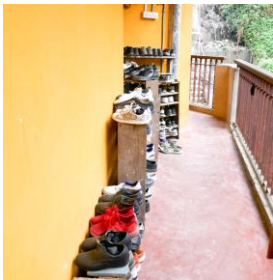
A visit to Darjeeling in March provided the opportunity catch up with events at the orphanages.



Like the boys, the older girls think about their futures after they leave school, so two of the young women sponsored by DCT and who were about to complete their college course at the FCI spent an hour one Saturday afternoon talking about the course. They were able to describe how they had just worked for the first time as helpers at a major reception for business leaders at a conference in the town which had been their first experience of such an event. Most of the orphanage girls will go on to do other things but this session, like others held in the past, is one way of making them aware of the possibilities open to them.



The girls continue to receive counselling and health education sessions and they have a regular meeting with an adult member of staff to discuss any issues they have with the day to day working of their home. In addition, weekend vocational training in needlework skills provides a welcome break to the routine.



At the boys' orphanage pride in their new dormitories continues and shoes are left outside to ensure the floors are kept clean. Their old dining room and kitchen has been demolished as a planned part of the construction work going on on-site, so temporary corrugated walls have been put up around part of the new girls' dormitory structure and the boys keep dry and warm whilst they eat and do their homework.

Meanwhile, construction work on building the new dormitory accommodation for the girls is making good progress but is a challenging process. A view on a misty morning from the hillside opposite shows the site in March.

The demolition of the old buildings was slow due to the steepness of the site and difficult ground conditions and had to be done manually.



Rains in the early monsoon resulted in a mud flow over the site but thankfully the safety measures in place meant that everyone kept safe. Tarpaulins have now been erected and these allow work to continue throughout the rainy season. The photos below (from left) show the second dormitory block and access staircase and concrete casting taking place under cover.

**Could you help us reach our goal?** We estimate that funds remain for work to continue for about another six months at the current rate of progress, so if you would like to hold a special fund raiser to help work continue or would like to make a special donation, please get in touch! Whilst we have already raised £107,000 we still need a further £120,000 to complete the girls' accommodation or £160,000 to complete the whole project. If the money was available then amazingly all the work could be finished in 9-10 months. **You can make a donation on either our web site or facebook page.**



### Ten years of changing lives – a celebration!

What DCT has grown into since it was founded in 2008 is testament to our supporters - those that have been with us from the very beginning, and to new friends that we have been fortunate enough to find along the way.

So back in April at our 4<sup>th</sup> major event we wanted the night to be not just a fundraiser but a celebration of everything that has been achieved by the trust in ten years. This was also an opportunity to extend our gratitude to all our supporters which range from individual donors, to families and to corporate sponsors who continue to give generously and take a keen interest in our work and the goings on in Darjeeling.

This year the event was held at The Grange Hotel at Tower Bridge in partnership with Integrity International Trust, a UK registered charity whose mission it is to prevent human trafficking in Nepal and to support those that have been rescued from this global issue.

The evening started with pre-dinner drinks and canapes, followed by a 3-course dinner, live and silent auctions interluded with a vocal performance by Harmonia, a singing group made up of west end theatre performers. The fun filled evening ended with a DJ providing the music for guests to dance the night away.

We would like to say a huge thank you to those that were able to join us at this celebration or supported the event in some way - we raised a fantastic £18,000 which will allow us to continue our work Darjeeling and will make a major contribution to building the new girls' accommodation at the orphanage.



## A sunny day in Yorkshire for this year's Darjeeling Cup

It was a beautiful, clear and sunny day at Pontefract & District Golf Club for this year's Darjeeling Cup on 29th June. Each year we bring together around 40 golfers, many who are now familiar with the event and we always welcome a few new players.

It is an opportunity to catch up with friends and supporters and to raise funds for DCT in a fun way...albeit with a competitive edge for the keen golfers. It is also a chance to take a few minutes and update everyone on our work and the situation in Darjeeling.

The competition was intense and closer than ever - Jim Fisher eventually winning through to become the holder of the Darjeeling Cup for the second time. Well done Jim.

We were delighted to raise just under £4500.00 because of generous donations and sponsorship in addition to entry fees. A big thank you to everyone who took part or otherwise supported the day!



## A new partnership with the Cobra Foundation

Trustees are greatly delighted to announce a new partnership with the Cobra Foundation. The Foundation, which was founded in 2005, is an independent charity that provides health, education and community support for young people in south east Asia. DCT is lucky to be one of the recipients of the Foundation's financial grants and the provision of complimentary beer for fund raising events. The logo of Cobra Foundation is a mother elephant with her offspring and it reminds us never to forget those in need. A huge thank you from DCT trustees and the children and young people of Darjeeling!

## Drinking tea in Warwick raises funds for DCT!

Thomas Oken Tea Rooms based in Warwick serves over 30 speciality teas from around the world including, of course, Darjeeling! The Tea Rooms would like to support the work of the Darjeeling Children's Trust, especially in recognition of the fact that much of the Trust's work is with children and young people who come from families living on the Tea Estates.

The Tea Rooms is named after Thomas Oken who was Mayor of Warwick in the sixteenth century and who was a great benefactor to the town at that time, paying for a schoolmaster to teach the local children how to read and write. It seems fitting, therefore, that his legacy of supporting children's learning continues into the present day and across continents.

A big thank you to Jo and all the tea room customers!



## Support from Denmark for children in Darjeeling

A huge "TAK" or thank you to University College Absalon for its donation of school bags, pens and hundreds of pencils to the children of Darjeeling. It was a great pleasure to meet Alexander Leopold Watts from the University and to thank him and his wife for filling their bags to overflowing with these items on their journey to India and to take them both to view the building works going on to provide new accommodation for the orphanage girls.



**And finally ....** A huge thank you to all our supporters who continue to make a difference to the lives of so many children and young people in Darjeeling, enabling them to flourish and thrive in ways which would not otherwise be possible. Your support is vital to helping them achieve a better life.